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USE THIS TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE THE FLOW OF IDEAS OF YOUR VIRTUAL AND IN PERSON TEAMS.



Kraft Macaroni and Cheese is an easy-to-fix lunch or dinner. In August 2020, Kraft put the same ingredients into a new cardboard box and rebranded Kraft Macaroni and Cheese as a breakfast food (Wida, 2020).

Is that a “good” idea or a “bad” idea?

We would call it an adaptive idea but not a creative one.

Today we will discuss the management of adaptive and creative in in-person and virtual team settings.

What Gets Verbalized in Team Meetings?

In theory, the purpose of team brainstorming is to openly discuss all types of ideas at first. At a later stage, the team will sort out ideas. During brainstorming, however, there may be some ideas that team members decide not to share with colleagues.

What are those ideas not shared?

This was the focus of Stanford University psychologist Justin Berg's research. (2019). Berg conducted five experiments in which participants tackled novel technology projects. These projects included devising an innovative piece of fitness equipment or a mechanism to keep people from falling asleep in self-driving cars. Participants were asked to come up with three initial solutions and then rank those solutions from most to least promising. Berg then asked a group of experts to rate participants' ideas.

Berg found that when participants spent little time developing their ideas, their predicted rankings were statistically like the rankings of experts. In other words, going with your gut feel may be a good idea.

When participants spent more time fleshing out their ideas, however, the idea that ranked second-best often finished highest among the experts. And the top idea most frequently verbalized was not ranked as highly.

Adaptive versus Creative Ideas.

In business settings, Berg found that adaptive ideas tended to be the most verbalized. Adaptive ideas are often minor variations of proven ideas. Introducing Macaroni and Cheese as a breakfast food is a classic adaptive idea.

Adaptive ideas have virtues that are more apparent. It is easy to visualize the concrete steps necessary for completion.

Adaptive ideas are not necessarily creative. And sometimes the times require thinking "outside the box."

Creative ideas are more conceptual. Implementation steps are more difficult to articulate. Creative ideas may or may not be as obviously beneficial. An example of a creative idea was Netflix' decision to abandon its core distribution channel of providing DVDs by mail. It would pioneer creation of technology to download movies directly into computers.

The important implication of Berg's research is that employees may keep quiet about creative Ideas because they know adaptive Ideas will find greater initial appreciation.

Suggestions

When engaging in brainstorming, ask participants to come up with BOTH adaptive and creative ideas. Do not pit one against the other. Put them into separate categories.

Select the best idea from each category. Move first in getting funds for the adaptive idea, since it will be the easiest to sell up the corporate hierarchy. While you implement the adaptive idea, have the team spend time fleshing out the best creative idea.

Management coach and Board Chair John Ela (2020) argues that both types of ideas should be given equal respect.

Conclusions

When asking your team to brainstorm, the team may be biased toward generating adaptive ideas while remaining silent with creative thoughts. Ask team members to submit both types of ideas but place them in separate categories.

When conducting team meetings online, it is important that the leader structure discussions by first focusing on adaptive and then focusing on creative. The framework of online conversations tends to make it difficult for shy people to "raise their hand" and contradict the loudest voices.

Do not place much trust in team dynamics. Place your trust in the structure of the meeting. And the most important structure is this: who is NOT talking. Can you get the quiet ones to participate?

Brian Wagner is a digital marketing leader who writes: "This issue has particular relevance. Thinking out of the box may be required for long-term organizational survival, yet there are so many financial and emotional pressures to focus on next quarter."

References

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Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Boston-based Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. Its mission is “Leadership and Career Success” for value senior level employees and partners: retained search, coaching, and executive outplacement.

Each month PSYCHOLOGY TODAY publishes their perspectives about career management and leadership success. There have been over 375,000 downloads of “Platform for Success.” The partners are co-authors of NAVIGATING THE WATERFALL, a book on career management in the 21 Century. It is available on Amazon.com

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